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A Splendid Little War

Does Anyone Remember in 1998?

"Remember the Maine"—dastardly attack
"A Splendid Little War"—easy and cheap victory
"You May Fire When Ready Gridley"—heroic leadership



Tombstone at the national cemetery in Sitka, Alaska.

These jingoistic slogans captured America's public consciousness in the spring and summer of 1898, and galvanized public opinion for a quick war against a decaying colonial empire that soon brought the United States onto the world scene as an imperial power. This little-remembered "lightning war"—a precursor to more deadly international adventures and conflicts in the 20th century—is but a faded memory. This year is the centenary of a land and naval conflict marked by armed invasion of Cuba and Puerto Rico, two major naval battles, and a three-year counter-insurgency in the Philippines. This article will examine how the nation has interpreted the Spanish-American War with its monumental cultural resources. How this conflict has been memorialized can help illustrate how Americans of an earlier time felt about the war and how they wanted their descendants to remember those who fought as well as providing patriotic lessons.

History

In the 1890s, Americans were upset with Spain's repressive tactics in Cuba. A long-running and often bloody rebellion against the waning Spanish empire resulted in Spain's military intervention and establishment of brutal concentration camps to imprison the determined rebels. The United States sent the battleship *Maine* to Havana in late January 1898, ostensibly as a "friendly" visit but actually as a show of force by the world's fifth largest naval power. On February 18, a mysterious explosion sank

Maine at its berth, killing 260 American sailors.

There was an immediate and loud outcry for retaliation. President William McKinley asked Spain for an armistice in Cuba to be followed by a more substantive peace. By April 9, Spain agreed in principle, but two days later McKinley requested that Congress send troops to Cuba. What started as a war to free Cuba from Spain quickly evolved into acquisition of an overseas empire.

Congress declared war on April 19. The Navy deployed in the Atlantic and Pacific, and two engagements put the Spanish fleet out of commission. Under Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt ordered Admiral George Dewey to move the Asiatic Squadron from Hong Kong to Manila in late April. Dewey scored a stunning victory over the outgunned Spanish on May 1. On July 3 the Atlantic Squadron, under the leadership of Admiral William T. Sampson and Commodore W.S. Schley, destroyed Admiral Pascual Cervera's fleet at Santiago, Cuba.

Since the Regular Army had only 25,000 trained troops, Congress requested an immediate increase to 62,000 with a call for 125,000 volunteers. Volunteers and National Guard units trained near Chattanooga. The regulars gathered at Tampa which became the embarkation point for Cuba. General Nelson A. Miles, a Civil War and Indian Wars veteran, assumed command. Contingents finally embarked for Cuba in June. Arms, ammunition, food, clothing and medical supplies were scarce. General William R. Shafter landed approximately 18,000 troops at Santiago in late June.

The U.S. Army defeated Spanish forces at several small battles in early July. These actions included El Caney and San Juan Hill—the site of Teddy Roosevelt's exploits with the Rough Riders. American forces occupied Puerto Rico without incurring major opposition. Spain signed a preliminary peace treaty on August 12 in which it surrendered Cuba, Guam, agreed to the American

Monument in the Village Common, Concord, Massachusetts.



occupation of Manila, and ceded Puerto Rico. Spain signed the Treaty of Paris on December 8, agreeing to assume Cuba's debt and ceding the Philippines to the U.S. After rancorous debate, Congress approved the treaty on February 6, 1899. The U.S. now had an overseas empire. Cuba became an independent entity under American hegemony while the Philippines became embroiled in a bloody three-year insurrection.

In this four-month war 460 soldiers and sailors were killed; another 5,200 fell to malaria, dysentery, and typhoid. The longer, more bloody war to suppress native freedom fighters in the Philippines between 1899-1901 consumed \$170 million and 4,300 American lives.

How America Remembers the War

Since the major theater of activity occurred overseas, the principal physical remains of the war are cemeteries and memorials managed by various civic entities. There are scant physical remnants of the training facilities or the embarkation points in the U.S., other than limited interpretive signs. The National Park Service offers limited interpretation of the war at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and San Juan National Historic Site. Other than reading the historians' view of the war, Americans of 1998 can learn more by personally observing the meaning of that era's memorialization of the Spanish-American War. The management of these cultural resources by a host of civic and governmental entities has been exemplary.

Memorialization of the Spanish-American War combined traditional construction and materials with factual information as well as symbolic patriotic messages. The graves of those killed in action and the veterans are scattered throughout the U.S. from Arlington National Cemetery to the national cemetery in Sitka, Alaska, and provide the most fundamental examples of postwar memorialization. The marble tombstones bearing the

name, life dates, unit, and state provide the most fundamental memorial to those who served and fought. Typical 19th-century cemetery and funereal monuments such as rough boulders or dressed stone are another form of commemoration. Soldier statues are a relatively common Spanish-American War memorial. Other memorials feature a soldier or a sailor figure with a warship—symbols that project America's recent arrival as a naval power on the international scene in the 1890s. Unlike the brutal internal Civil War and its more local military unit or specific battle action memorials, many Spanish-American War monuments illustrate America's presence on the world stage. Some memorials depict a Liberty/Columbia/Eagle figure that represents the nation's essence in the late-19th century. The most elaborate Spanish-American War memorials are professionally designed structures featuring dressed stone (usually marble) with a symbolic figure, military-oriented statues, and explanatory plaques. The most poignant memorials display salvaged artifacts or recast metal removed from the battleship *Maine's* twisted remains. Monuments have been erected at the battle sites in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Besides grave markers, large boulders with attached bronze plaques provide the fundamental Spanish-American War memorial. These monuments usually bear the names of fallen local servicemen, but inscriptions appear extremely spartan. These basic monuments do not convey lofty, symbolic patriotic messages.

Many soldier statues were placed as standard Spanish-American War memorials. An archetypal memorial in front of the City Hall in Troy, New York features a soldier, full uniform and slouch hat, and a 30/40 Krag-Jorgensen rifle. A statue on the capitol grounds in Columbia honors South Carolinians who served in the war. A statue entitled *The Hiker* is located on Memorial Drive just outside of Arlington National Cemetery.* This classic monument is seen by all who enter the visitor center area by motor vehicle. The same style statue graces the Memorial Building in Dayton, Ohio.

Other memorials were more ornate. A professionally-designed, Spanish-American War memorial was constructed at Columbus Circle in New York City to provide a monumental gateway to Central Park. This massive structure contains several larger-than-life figures including statues symbolizing the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. A smaller statuary group includes a representation of *Maine* and a Columbia/Liberty figure holding a child, symbolizing Spain's former colonies. An intricate memorial in Bushnell Park near the capitol in Hartford, Connecticut, depicts an armed, winged figure of Liberty or Columbia standing on the bow

Memorial in Bushnell Park, Hartford, Connecticut.



of a ship symbolizing America's naval strength in the late 1890s. Two bas relief figures placed on bronze plaques denote army and navy personnel in action. There is ample room to sit at the base of the memorial, an invitation for a person to linger and contemplate the sacrifices made by American servicemen.



The *Maine* mast in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia. Photo courtesy NPS Maritime Program.

Like previous and subsequent wars, the display of various military artifacts serves as monuments to the participants. Some of the most heart wrenching memorials were constructed from salvaged remnants of *Maine*. For instance, one of the ship's masts is located in a prominent place at Arlington National Cemetery; a sign identifies it for the visitor. A monument located at the Veterans Administration Medical Center complex in Dayton, Ohio, depicts a bowed Liberty figure with a shield pointing to an olive branch with the sunken *Maine* in the background. The inscription reads "IN MEMORIAM U.S.S. MAINE DESTROYED HAVANA HARBOR FEBRUARY 15, 1898/THIS TABLET IS CAST FROM METAL RECOVERED FROM THE U.S.S. MAINE." The memorial was erected by the "MAJOR WM. MCKINLEY CAMP NO. 94 UNITED SPANISH WAR VETERANS IN 1930." A similar plaque made from salvaged metal is located in a city park in Richmond, Indiana. A bronze cruciform-shaped plaque attached to the boulder commemorates "PORTO (sic) RICO, CUBA, AND PHILIPPINES ISLANDS." The South Carolina state capitol in Columbia displays two wartime artifacts. One is a cannon recovered from *Maine* with an inscription: "THIS GUN CAME OFF THE BATTLESHIP MAINE/THE SINKING OF THE

Monument at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio.

MAINE RESULTED IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR 1898." The second, a cannon base with the inscription: "CANNON CAPTURED AT SANTIAGO, CUBA, SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, 1898/PRESENTED TO THE CITY OF COLUMBIA, S.C. BY THE UNITED STATES." Two Spanish-American era four-inch cannon are located in the National Cemetery at Sitka, U.S.S. *Olympia*, a sister ship to *Maine*, is moored in the Delaware River at Philadelphia. This 1890s battleship gives thousands of visitors a clear idea of the military hardware developed for the U.S. Navy used to defeat the Spanish. Beyond its use as a major tourist attraction, the old ship memorializes the sailors who fought in the war.

Several of the actual battle sites were commemorated just after the war. A 1906 photo of San Juan Hill depicts a stone shaft surrounded by cannon and shells, but an undated shot reveals that the cannon had been removed and the monument appeared in shabby condition. Veterans erected a monument at El Caney, another of the bloody engagements.

Spanish-American War memorials can be found in front of public buildings such as state capitols, city halls or county courthouses, cemeteries, urban parks, on the medians of urban thoroughfares and other places such as colleges. For example a simple memorial is attached to the entry gate at Hampden-Sydney College in Prince Edward County, Virginia. A bronze plaque bears the inscription: "HAMPDEN-SYDNEY ALUMNI WHO DIED IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR/WILLIAM D. PASCO '95 AND JOSEPH C. SPOTSWOOD '96."



Memorials have been placed on federal facilities such as military cemeteries and veterans hospitals that provide a direct link to these bygone events. The memorials and monuments cited in this article were extremely attractive and well tended, demonstrating a society's commitment to remembrance of its military conflicts.



Memorial at the Deer Lodge County courthouse in Anaconda, Montana.

Due to the brevity of the war, only the larger cities, for the most part, display the Spanish-American War memorials, although one can occasionally find monuments in rural communities. Unlike costlier World War I, World War II or more recent wars, small-town America does not appear to have widespread Spanish-American War memorial representation due to the

limited number of servicemen involved in the three-month war.

A number of the monuments sandwich the Spanish-American War between the Civil War and World War I and even World War II. A dramatic memorial with a bronze eagle with spread wings located at the Deer Lodge County courthouse in Anaconda, Montana, lists several wars. The inscription reads: "SPANISH AMERICAN WAR & PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION 1898-1902" in between references to the Civil War and the (First) World War. At the Tarrant County courthouse in Fort Worth, Texas, a monument links the Civil War with the Spanish-American War. "IN MEMORY OF CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS 1861-1865 AND THEIR DESCENDANTS/WHO SERVED IN SPANISH AMERICAN WAR/WORLD WAR I/WORLD WAR II/ERECTED BY JULIA JACKSON CHAPTER UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY 1953." Lakeview Cemetery near Calumet, Michigan displays a Civil War statue with wording "TO THE MEMORY OF HER HONORED DEAD VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR AND OF THE SPANISH WAR/CALUMET ERECTS THIS MONUMENT MAY-1900." The listing of the Spanish-American War with previous and later wars as opposed to a memorial dedicated entirely to the brief conflict probably stems from the number of enlistees from that community, available funding to erect a monument, as well as of the presence of an active veterans organization.

Just as the devout in the Middle Ages revered relics reputed to represent early church history, a more secular era constructs its version of venerated objects. The purpose of these war memorials was to give the observer pause for reflection and a reminder of armed conflict as well as providing instruction in patriotic values. A major difference between the Spanish-American War memori-

als compared to those of earlier American wars is their allegorical and symbolic artwork. For the most part, Civil War monuments are literal manifestations that depict soldiers and sailors with limited evidence of subliminal patriotic messages. Monument designers and builders in the early 1900s chose to broaden patriotic messages with mythic forms that symbolized the role and influence of the nation on the world stage. The majestic female figure representing America/Columbia/Liberty with a warship prominently appears in a number of large memorials. It sends a message to the viewer that America had much more meaning than the traditional military presence depicted in the soldier and sailor monuments, the grave marker type memorial, or salvaged remnants of *Maine*. The United States had arrived on the international scene, and the larger monuments such as the Central Park or Hartford memorials literally interpret the emergence of America's overseas influence. Although the issue of whether or not the U.S. should take on a colonial empire was hotly debated at the time, these larger memorials instruct their viewers to accept the glory, honor, and especially the sacrificial responsibility of foreign involvement. Monuments and memorials that were raised in the early 1900s provided not too subtle messages that helped prepare Americans for even larger and deadlier foreign adventures in the 20th century. Thus, these extant cultural resources provide instruction and interpretation of America's past.

Overall, there are not many Spanish-American War memorials commemorating events of 100 years ago. These cultural resources project a patriotic message long after the war's veterans passed from the scene, and give contemporary Americans an appreciation of and information about an almost forgotten conflict. If one searches with a modicum of diligence, a Spanish-American War memorial will be spotted somewhere to remind Americans of 1998 that the nation fought a short war a century ago, a war whose aftermath gave America an overseas empire marked by consequences that affect the nation even at the end of the 20th century.

Note

* Also see *CRM*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-25.

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